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# FBI Probes Charges of Helms Leak to Chileans

## Senator Denies Allegations That He or an Aide Tipped Regime to U.S. Intelligence Operation

By DOYLE McMANUS, *Times Staff Writer*  
WASHINGTON—The FBI is investigating charges that Sen. Jesse Helms or one of his aides deliberately exposed a secret U.S. intelligence operation directed against the rightist military government of Chile, Administration officials said Sunday.

The Senate Intelligence Committee asked the FBI to launch the probe after the State Department and CIA presented evidence that linked Helms to the Chileans' discovery of the operation last month, the officials said.

The intelligence operation, which officials refused to describe, was apparently aimed at gathering secret information about the regime of Gen. Augusto Pinochet. "The Chileans were furious" when they learned of it, one official said.

Sen. Helms (R-N.C.) denied the charges and accused Administration officials of launching the investigation for political purposes.

"The State Department and the CIA are constantly trying to discredit me, and they're not going to be able to do it," he said in an interview with the *New York Times*, which first disclosed the investigation. "The real need is for the State Department and the CIA to clean up their acts."

"If they want to play the game of intimidation, of harassment and of leaks, we'll meet them right in the middle of the field," the newspaper quoted Helms as saying.

Christopher Manion, a Helms aide on the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he was unaware of the inquiry until it was reported in the press. He said he did not believe Helms could be reached for further comment.

Helms, a fervent defender of Pinochet's regime, was in Chile last month on a weeklong visit. He has frequently criticized the State Department for putting what he considers excessive pressure on Pinochet to move toward democratic elections.

One source said the Chileans told the Administration that they learned of the intelligence operation shortly after Helms' visit—

leading officials to trace the leak back to the conservative senator.

Several Administration officials, all of whom spoke on condition of anonymity, said that senior officials in both the State Department and the CIA were angered by the exposure of the covert operation.

"This was a very, very bad thing to do," said a senior official involved in the issue.

He said the evidence that Helms or a member of his staff had exposed the operation was solid.

"It is not third- or fourth-hand evidence," said an official directly involved in the issue. "It's better than that."

"Somebody clearly misused intelligence information here," said another knowledgeable official. He added that some evidence suggests that a Helms aide, rather than the senator himself, may have been the source of the leak.

Helms, as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's subcommittee on Western Hemisphere affairs, is frequently given access to sensitive information on Latin America, officials said.

The senator has tangled almost constantly during the last five years with the State Department, which he accuses of sabotaging President Reagan's foreign policies.

Gun-shy State Department officials refused to comment Sunday on the FBI probe, except for one who carefully pointed out, "It's not us who initiated this investigation; it's the Senate Intelligence Committee."

In Chile last month, Helms praised the Pinochet regime as one of the most anti-Communist in Latin America, and he denounced the American ambassador there for attending the funeral of a young man who witnesses said was set on fire by uniformed men during an anti-government demonstration.

"If President Reagan were here, I believe he would send this ambassador home," Helms said in an interview with Chile's state-run television network.

A White House spokesman responded that the Ambassador,

Harry G. Barnes Jr., "is carrying out the President's policy in Chile, which is to encourage and support movement toward democracy."

In 1984, Helms accused the U.S. ambassador in El Salvador of violating Reagan's policies and of secretly rigging a presidential election to deny victory to that country's leading rightist political figure, Roberto d'Aubuisson.

When a rightist plot to assassinate the ambassador was later discovered, some State Department officials charged that Helms had unwittingly encouraged it. Helms denied those charges and invited D'Aubuisson to Washington to rebut accusations that he had been involved in the plot.

The investigation of Helms follows a spate of controversies over unauthorized disclosures of intelligence information.

Reagan's Cabinet has met several times to consider new penalties against federal employees for revealing classified information, and the State and Defense departments have fired several officials for leaking information to the press. CIA Director William J. Casey has also warned that the Administration may prosecute news organizations if they publish or broadcast previously secret information about electronic intelligence-gathering.

The Senate Intelligence Committee asked the FBI to investigate the charges against Helms under a Senate rule that prohibits members and their aides from disclosing classified information that they obtain through official business.